

A GOOD SOCIETY

THE LAW OF GOD AND PUBLIC POLICY: PART 4



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

A Good Society
The Law of God and Public Policy: Part 4
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A Good Society

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A Good Society

Welcome to *A Good Society*

Everybody wants to live in a good society. Those who lead the institutions of society want to contribute to such a society. The problem is not that some people are deliberately seeking to make ours a bad, corrupt, or unstable society.

The problem is that we have not viable, widespread, working consensus on what a good society is.

But Paul had some ideas about this question, and his view of a good society can guide us as we think about the kind of public policies necessary for realizing more of the goodness of God in the land of the living.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Just and Good

“You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality, nor take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. You shall follow what is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 16.19, 20

For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. Romans 13.3, 4

The goal of public policy

We have said that the goal of public policy must be to ensure a just society, one in which the very character of God defines the parameters and practices of moral and social conduct. God’s character is holy, and that holiness comes to expression in goodness and love. The Law of God, as an expression of God’s character, is holy and righteous and good, and thus shows the way to love for God and neighbors (Rom. 7.12; 1 Jn. 5.1-13; Matt. 22.34-40).

Of course, many in our society will take a different view. Many do not believe that God should have any say in morals, culture, or the social order. They prefer to make up the rules of public policy as we go along, being free, as they suppose, to adjust policies and practices in line with changes in the times.

But no Christian can agree that this is a proper way to order society. We look to God and His Word to define a just and good social order, and we commit ourselves to seeking such a society by every available means.

Justice, as an expression of God’s goodness, is a jewel with five facets, and the Law of God outlines the specific nature and practice of each of these forms of justice. But justice must begin in those who hold to God’s Law, live it every day, and can understand its implications for helping to create a good society.

A just society is the “good” for which government has been instituted by God. No government ever retained power for very long by announcing that it was opposed to justice and hostile to goodness. Attaining justice and goodness is the stated purpose of every politician, no matter his party or platform or whether his promises are disingenuous or sincere. In a free society such as ours, one cannot expect to be elected to office unless he is able to persuade the electorate that he and his policies are on the side of justice and goodness.

But unless we define each of these terms, and hold to and practice them assiduously, we will always be in danger of being persuaded that “justice” and “goodness” actually mean, in the end, something like “whatever is best for me and my party or tribe.”

Goodness

We have defined justice; but what is goodness? When justice is maintained, goodness should flourish. On the other hand, if we don’t have a clear conception of the good society, justice may be easily perverted, bent to fit the agenda of those whose aims are less than truly “good.”

“Justice” and “goodness” are like the near and far sights of a rifle. We must line them up together, and keep them in focus, if we are to hit the target of policies that are in line with God’s purposes.

It is important, therefore, that Christians possess an idea of the *good* society, a society in which only what is altogether just is being followed in every area of public policy and private life. And, from the Christian perspective, such an idea can only derive from considering the teaching of God’s Word.

In 1 Timothy 2.1-4 Paul wrote, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and*

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giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Here is an outline of a “good and acceptable” social order, one that pleases God and benefits all people. When justice and only justice defines the policies and daily practices of a people, and a good society, such as Paul envisioned, is our common aim, we will surely come closer to realizing God’s purpose for government and public policy. And while realizing that purpose will not achieve a utopia or even a theocracy, it will make for a society where freedom can flourish, truth can be known, and goodness will thrive.

Toward a good society

A just and good society, from Paul’s perspective, will be guided and informed by the holy and righteous (just) and good Law of God. So whatever Paul envisions as a summary of the “good” society, we may take it as a goal of our Christian lives to strive to attain such an ideal by every means available to us, including, as Paul mentions here and we have previously explained, prayer, and applications of the Law of God.

We are not utopians, and we do not believe that realizing a more just society—a society more in line with the good God has in mind for government—will lead to salvation. But we do believe that justice can be achieved, and goodness can increase as government at all levels is influenced to make policies in line with the Law of God and all His Word.

So before we proceed further into the teaching of God’s Law with respect to public policy, we need to examine the various terms Paul uses to outline the parameters of the good society: peaceful and quiet, godly and dignified in every way, characterized by truth, and friendly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Understanding the good society and believing that greater measures of goodness can be realized for all members of our society will reinforce our determination to work for policies that are just, and that bring honor to God and benefit to all people.

For reflection

1. Why would some people oppose appealing to God’s Word to help in shaping public policy? How should we respond to such people?
2. Every public policymaker will insist that he or she is on the side of justice and goodness. How are those terms used and defined in our day?
3. If Christians do not work for justice and goodness in public policymaking, what kinds of policies can we expect?

Next steps—Preparation: What is your view of the good society? Could you explain your view to a fellow believer? Is your view more in line with the teaching of Scripture or the temper of the times?

2 Quiet and Peaceable

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life... 1 Timothy 2.1, 2

Paul on the “good society”

We are looking at the apostle Paul’s counsel to the minister of the churches in Ephesus regarding what to work for in the way of a “good society.” Once we’ve gained an understanding of his instruction on this matter, we will return to the Law of God, which Paul explained is holy and righteous and good, to see how it can guide us in working for policies agreeable to the formation and maintenance of a good society.

We note two things right off the bat: Public policymakers are in the crosshairs of Paul’s prayer, and prayer is the place to begin in trying to shape the policies they make. Paul especially called on men to take up this challenge of engaging public policy with the language of prayer (v. 8). If we can’t get the men in our churches to seek the Lord concerning such matters, we’ll be stuck with whatever policies “kings and all who are in authority” foist upon us.

But if we can get men to enter the public policymaking arena at the point of prayer, we might find that a just and good society will be more likely to emerge. In this part of our study, we want to examine more closely what Paul meant by a good society. And his first criteria for a good society is that it be one in which people lead quiet and peaceable lives.

Our disquieting times

The words “quiet and peaceable” are at the heart of what many people insist is missing in our own society today. So narcissistic, self-centered, and disrespectful of persons and property have we become, and so loud, brazen, and even violent in making our desires known, that few today, I suspect, would characterize our society as “quiet and peaceable.” We are wary of just about everyone and fearful of some. We arm our homes with security systems and extra locks, and, for good measure, some of us even keep a little “peacemaker” ready to hand—just in case.

Evidence abounds indicating that we are neither a peaceable nor a quiet people. Listen to the uncivil tone of public debate and the vulgarity that characterizes so much of everyday conversation. Hear the angry lyrics of certain kinds of pop music and see the glorified violence in so much of contemporary film. Note the increase of road rage, domestic violence, flash mob crime, protest looting and burning, and identity theft. Observe the increasing use of security cameras in public places. Consider the dog-eat-dog atmosphere that characterizes the world of business and trade.

Such are hardly the characteristics of a people who are living quiet and peaceable lives.

The gods of relativism

When people turn away from God, they look to themselves as gods and chart a course in life that seems to work for them. If that means disrespecting others and their property—setting aside the fifth, eighth, and tenth commandments and most forms of obligatory justice—so be it.

But as is by now apparent, we cannot achieve a good society when everyone is free to do what seems right in their own mind. The infamous “mystery clause” of the 1992 Supreme Court decision, *Planned Parenthood v Casey*, solemnly declared the right of every American to define their own worldview. And Americans have leaped at the opportunity with a vengeance. Now “tolerance” is the only virtue and “intolerance” is not to be, well, tolerated. We should all be able to say what we want, do what we want, wear what we want, sleep with whom we want, and get away with as much as we can.

But the problem is that people get shouted down. Property is jeopardized or destroyed. Law and order evaporate. And people die—Aurora, Colorado; Newtown, Connecticut; Boston, Massachusetts; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Nashville, Tennessee; Lewistown, Maine, to remember a few.

Not the fault of government, but...

Our present condition of disquiet is not the fault of our federal government. Not entirely, anyway. But whatever policies of America's government—at all levels—have encouraged or exacerbated this situation must be reviewed and replaced.

For example, teaching relativist ethics and identity politics in public schools, using courts and executive decrees to make laws reflecting the temper of the times, and failing to require restoration or minimizing retribution for crimes against persons and property: such practices are neither just nor good. Rather than secure peace and quiet for all citizens, such policies make it increasingly likely that the wants of some will jeopardize the liberties, properties, and wellbeing of others.

Governments can't do everything to ensure a peaceable and quiet society. Recovering protocols of decency and consideration, and exposing and condemning incivility, disrespect, and violence against others are the work of families, churches, friends, and peer groups, as well as private associations of various kinds. Government policies have a role in this, but public policies promoting a peaceable and quiet life will not be a priority of government until they are seen to be highly valued among the population at various levels.

A good society is one in which people feel safe and secure from threats and are part of a caring community. Public policy is more than law. It commands, enforces, and punishes behavior, but it also speaks to the way we think and live in society. We need a widespread, lively public debate about the tenets of a peaceable and quiet life. And we need new public policies to direct us toward such a society and to discourage attitudes and actions that counsel chaos and confusion.

And such can happen, Paul insisted, if men will pray.

For reflection

1. Do the men in your church pray for a peaceable and quiet life for our society? How might you help them in doing so?
2. Do you think having a more peaceable and quiet society would affect people's overall attitudes toward life? Explain.
3. In what ways might a more peaceable and quiet society be conducive to the spread of the Gospel?

Next steps—Transformation: Look at your own life and your relationships. Is there room for a more peaceable and quiet life in your spheres? How can you improve your own practice and promotion of a peaceable and quiet life?

3 In All Godliness

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness... 1 Timothy 2.1, 2

*“Oh, that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways!
I would soon subdue their enemies,
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
The haters of the LORD would pretend submission to Him,
But their fate would endure forever. Psalm 81.13-15*

Government and the good society

Paul explained that a good society begins in prayer, specifically, as men beseech God in every way and every place for those who have authority and how they use it. Men who pray for a good society are more likely to embody it, encourage others to seek it, and work to make it a reality.

Civil government and all powers-that-be are God’s servants for good. Society is good, in the first instance, when authorities maintain order and civility—when people can live, work, study, and socialize in peace and quiet. Any government which, without repression or violence, manages a social atmosphere of peace and quiet is serving the purposes of God.

All those in authority are accountable to God to create and maintain just and good societies—homes, schools, businesses, cultural institutions, communities, governments. Moreover, all people have a sense of what “goodness” and “justice” look like, and they know when they are living in peace and quiet with their neighbors. This is because, at least in part, God has created people with the works of His Law written on their hearts (Rom. 2.14, 15).

Thus, Christians should expect that, as we are faithful in listening to God’s Word and walking in His ways, we can influence the people and powers of our society to follow suit. Put another way, as godliness increases within the Church, those outside the pale of faith will be inclined to imitate our example (cf. Mic. 4.1-4).

Legislate morality?

The second characteristic of the good or just society, according to the apostle Paul, is that it promotes the flourishing of virtue—godliness and dignity. Here is precisely where Christians may expect to hear the objection, “You can’t legislate morality.”

In fact, morality is the *only* thing you can legislate, for all public policies are grounded in and expressive of some moral system. In our secular society, public policies increasingly reflect utilitarian, pragmatic, relativistic, or partisan ends. But such views, because they reject unchanging or absolute standards of goodness and justice, only create conflict and uncertainty and lead to political partisanship and gridlock.

When the only standards guiding the creation of public policy are grounded in worldly aspirations and hopes, disappointment and uncertainty will be the order of the day. And the more such worldviews are put in force by legislation and public policy, the less we can expect peace and quiet and godliness to obtain.

Beginning in prayer, Christians must work to help government and all those in authority serve for a just and good society. This means we must seek to interpret the canons of godliness, revealed in God’s Law, into the public policy agendas of our institutions. And that means working for laws and policies that reflect the teaching of the Law of God.

Keeping the Law will not save lost people. However, a society informed and shaped by God's Law can expect to know more of His blessings than one that defies or ignores His holy standards.

Godliness and public policy

How can Christians bring more godliness into public policy? First, by setting a godly example in all aspects of our lives, including praying for those in power and authority at every level in our society. But let me suggest three additional approaches to working for morality more in line with that which God approves.

First, we must always *oppose laws that require or permit ungodly practices*. Confiscatory taxes, for example, have no basis in God's Law. Nor do certain schemes for redistributing income. It would not be just for a community to be required to allow a porn shop to open if the council and people felt this was a compromise of the community's moral code. Private organizations should not be compelled to hire people who do not share their worldview or mission. Such achievements may seem unlikely, but we need only recall the recent overturning of *Roe v Wade* to show what determination, prayer, and hard work can do.

Second, we must seek to *encourage policies that reward godly behavior*. Giving tax breaks for charitable contributions falls into this category. Community programs that foster a form godliness—scouting and FFA, for example, and church planting, or time-release programs in schools—should be encouraged. Zoning laws, building codes, and community covenants can preserve the value of neighbors' property and the beauty of a community. School curricula, business practices, institutional missions, even children's sports leagues can foster godly behavior and should be a focus of policymaking.

Third, we must seek to *persuade the powers-that-be to adopt policies that restrain ungodliness*. Defining ungodliness will always be a challenge. But consensus exists on certain matters. Thieves should be punished, as should be those who instigate violence or riots, who slander or maliciously injure others, or who are publicly obscene. As much as we can agree with the existing consensus on such laws, Christians should support keeping them and establishing more such laws to restrain wickedness.

Affecting public policy for godliness can be a long slog, and there will always be much work to do at lower levels of policymaking before laws encouraging godliness are put on the books. We must work those levels diligently toward the time when laws can once again be crafted to promote godliness in every form. If men pray, that will provide a good start and a solid foundation.

For reflection

1. In any society, those in authority operate at various levels and in many venues. What are the "power centers" of your community?
2. Do you know any Christians working in those "power centers"? Do you pray for them and for those who work with them?
3. What does your church do to equip its families to understand justice and the Law of God? What are you doing for yourself in this regard?

Next steps—Transformation: Put together a list of local powers-that-be to pray for regularly, even if only by office rather than name. Encourage others to join you. Take up the study of a just and good society, and work to become an example of what you are learning.

4 Dignity and Respect

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence... 1 Timothy 2.1, 2

Human dignity

Paul is outlining for us the basic components of a good society. We can be sure that his view of goodness was informed by the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Rom. 7.12). Thus, we're looking to him to frame out our understanding of a good society before we return to the Law of God itself for more specific details in working for public policies conducive to such a society.

We've seen that, in Paul's mind, a good society is one in which people live peaceably and in quiet with their neighbors, and where godliness is encouraged, nurtured, and preserved. Paul continues his brief discussion with the mention that, in a good society, people must be allowed to live dignified lives in every way. The word translated "reverence" in NKJV is perhaps better rendered "dignity", which according to Louw and Nida indicates "behavior which is befitting, implying a measure of dignity leading to respect—propriety, befitting behavior" (cf. ESV, "dignified" and NASB, "dignity").

The word for dignity here is closely related to godliness. It refers to honor, worthiness, even holiness of life. Paul's vision of a good society was one in which "all people" might be free to realize their full worthiness and potential as beings made in the image of God. While it is only just to extend dignity and respect to all men, it is the responsibility of those charged with making and keeping public policy to ensure that society provides a fertile ground for such human flourishing, beginning with their own example.

Those in positions of authority at all levels of society are thus charged by God with encouraging a sense of dignity and respect among their constituents.

Demeaning practices

So, for example, practices which demean others should not be tolerated. We have seen what happens in a society where elitism, racism, classism, cancel culture, and partisan politics prevail in public life. To the extent that policymakers encourage or allow such behavior, they share responsibility for the many ills that attend to it—tribalism, indifference to the poor, contempt for people of different worldviews, sexism, partisanship, and so forth.

Further, a culture of moral permissiveness, encouraged by public policies wrapped in the garb of "free speech" and "individual rights", has corrupted our view of human sexuality and is destroying the institutions working to preserve a view of sexuality which is noble, honorable, edifying, and dignified. Those in authority in culture and society should strive for a more dignified approach to sexuality and discourage the kind of licentiousness that prevails in our day. But they are not likely to do so without strong encouragement from their constituents.

Whatever demeans human beings, pandering to our base desires and leading us to lives of degradation, dependency, or dishonor must be opposed by authorities at all levels of society. Gambling does not dignify the human soul. Nor does allowing free access to addictive drugs. Certain forms of pop culture demean not only women, but also men, and encourage violence and unbridled self-indulgence. Should such entertainments be encouraged? Should heads of households, leaders in church and school, and government officials not seek practices that lead to dignity rather than debasement?

It can sound very "puritanical" and perhaps even a bit tyrannical to try to use law and other forms of social pressure to restrain the baser affections and inclinations of the human soul. But we are already doing so in

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our society. We are already using law to restrain behaviors which all agree are not to be tolerated, and we have done so as a society from the beginning of the American experiment. And law is not our only recourse; consensus at every level of society can also play a powerful role in promoting dignity and respect, as can purchasing power and choices of what to watch on television or which websites to visit.

The problem today is that we keep lowering the bar of what we will tolerate, and thus we degrade the terms of human dignity, adjust our legal standards accordingly, and incur the problems such degradation brings with it.

Christian homes and churches can provide a powerful alternative to the demeaning practices and policies that flood our society today. Plenty of examples exist for Christians to appeal to for encouragement and counsel in seeking more dignified lives. Augustine's journey to faith began in earnest as he came to realize how demeaning to human dignity were the gladiatorial combats and other "entertainments" in which he had become involved. John Newton was a slave trader before the Gospel transformed him and gave him a more dignified and respectful way of life.

Recovering dignity and respect should be an aim of every person in authority who serves in their calling as a follower of Christ. And all Christians must work to achieve a greater measure of dignity in all forms of public life.

Show, then teach

As in all areas of public policymaking, Christians must first embody what we seek, even as we are laboring to teach it. We must be careful to demonstrate God's standards of dignity and honor, and to practice them in community with one another before we try to turn such practices into public policy. Our neighbors need to see what a good society can look like, and how it can benefit them and their children, before they will consider the need for laws and other policies that promote dignity throughout our society.

We must show good reasons why we support such policies and practices. We must patiently explain that certain kinds of behavior, because they make us less than dignified image-bearers of God, should not be encouraged in whatever social spheres we have influence or presence.

Again, this is nothing new; our society already restricts and prohibits, under penalty of law, certain kinds of behaviors which it regards as beneath human dignity. We're not auguring for some new use of the law. Rather, we simply want to achieve, in our lives and by public policy, a raising of the bar of dignity, for only thus will we know a greater measure of justice and relieve the stress and distress that *lowering* the bar of dignity has foisted on our society.

Like all the work of justice, we must pray for the dawning of a new day of dignity and respect. Men must pray for those in authority at all levels of our society that we may know greater dignity and respect, for these are crucial components of a good society.

For reflection

1. What opportunities are available to you each day to show others dignity and respect?
2. What can churches do to help parents teach dignity and respect to their children?
3. How might showing more dignity and respect reduce the influence of tribalism in our culture?

Next steps—Transformation: Pray that God will make you an agent of dignity and respect. Pray each day that you will show dignity and respect to the people with whom you are engaged.

5 Friendly to the Gospel

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2.1-4

A good society

A good society, according to the apostle Paul, is one where those in authority at all levels work to maintain peace and quiet, encourage godliness in all its forms, and promote human dignity and wellbeing. These ideas of “goodness” can be interpreted into public policy, in both private and public spheres; and it is the responsibility of the Christian community to work for such a society by every available means.

Beginning with prayer. If we will not pray for a good society—earnestly, daily, in every context, and by all means—we cannot expect God to do what only He can do in bringing His goodness to light in the land of the living (Ps. 27.13).

Believers must teach these concepts of goodness in every generation, defining goodness and a good society in ways that are not susceptible to easy alteration or adjustment, but have their grounding in fixed truths. Since, in our highly utilitarian, pragmatic, and narcissistic age, people are inclined to change their meanings and values to match their whims and wants, it will be important for the members of the Christian community to keep before the world—by word and deed—those unvarying precepts and moral principles, found in the Law of God and all Scripture, which alone can ensure that society will tend more toward the good end of the social spectrum.

Absent any meaningful and persuasive Christian presence in public policy arenas, society’s center cannot hold, and things can fall alarmingly apart over time. Without solid grounding in the Law of God, and all the counsel of God in Scripture, Christians will not be able to contribute to helping civil government and authorities at all levels achieve the good society which Paul outlines in 1 Timothy 2.

A fourth criterion

Paul adds a fourth criterion of the good society: It is friendly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A good society, the apostle observes, fosters an environment in which the Gospel can flourish for the benefit of all.

An environment hospitable to the Gospel does not just happen. Nor does it continue apart from continuous vigilance on the part of those who understand the true nature and importance of the Gospel from bringing God’s goodness to light. Indeed, as Paul indicates in Romans 1.18-32, the natural tendency of humankind, once God is rejected and replaced with idols of various kinds, is to drift further and further from the kind of moral environment which the Gospel finds hospitable to one in which the Gospel is regarded as an enemy of human “freedom.”

No one is going to come to our defense in working to maintain a strong Gospel presence in our society. Christians must work to ensure that the government which serves them and those who exercise authority in society remain friendly, not just to religion in general or to some vague notion of worship or spirituality, but to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the faith once for all transmitted to the believing community. The key to this being so will be our ability to live the Gospel in such a way as to find favor with our neighbors (Acts 2.47).

This will be a challenge in every generation, for, as Paul elsewhere reminds us, we only realize more of the Kingdom of God through trials and affliction (Acts 14.21, 22). We may well be required, should the situation

warrant, to oppose policies and practices that seek to curtail or silence the proclamation of the Gospel. Scripture provides grounds and means for civil disobedience of any government which would do so, and Christians must be neither ignorant of these nor reluctant to employ them when appropriate. God's desire is for all to be saved. They will not all be saved, of course; but public policy must not be the reason for that. Governments must not throw up a hindrance to anyone hearing the Good News, and authorities at all levels of society must recognize the freedom of believers to live for and talk about Jesus.

"Roping off" the Gospel

A misguided view of the doctrine of the separation of Church and State has been a tool whereby the enemies of the Gospel have enacted policies which have the effect of "roping off" large sectors of society against the preaching of the Gospel or the input of Christian teaching into public life. Public schools and the public square have been all but cut off from the input of Biblical thinking. Christians may teach and write and preach all we like about the Scriptures. But we may not do so wherever we like. Some constraints against preaching are reasonable, of course. People who have paid money to hear a concert or study a course should not expect to be interrupted by a Gospel harangue. Owners of businesses have a right to determine what kind of behavior they will tolerate on the sidewalks and in the parking lots and workspaces of their establishments, and they may exclude any form of solicitation or conversation which they find disagreeable to their purposes or interests. At the same time, Christians must show by our diligence, productivity, and support of our co-workers, that bringing Jesus into the workplace can positively affect an organization's culture and mission.

It is in the interest of any society for as many of its members as possible to know the Lord Jesus and to learn His Word and walk in His ways. Government must not infringe the right of Christians to gather for worship and other activities. All authorities must protect the right of believers to live and talk about their faith with as much zeal as one might discuss a favorite team or a new restaurant.

When public policy begins to encroach on the Christian's freedom and duty to proclaim the Good News, or to bring the benefits of the Gospel to the community, believers must continue our mission nonetheless and be ready to bear whatever punishments those in authority may choose to inflict. Christians do not seek suffering, but we must not shun it, particularly when by our suffering we can work for public policies more in line with the centrality of the Gospel for the wellbeing of all people.

It is the Christian's duty, working through the means of the Gospel and the opportunities for public-policymaking, to help to ensure that a society friendly to the Gospel continues to exist in our day and beyond.

For reflection

1. Why is it so important that Christians *live* their witness in every social context? Can we *testify* of Jesus credibly if our lives do not back up our words? Explain.
2. The Gospel is the Gospel of the Kingdom, which is, as Paul wrote, righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). How can Christians work to bring more of this Kingdom presence into their life spheres?
3. If someone, seeing the hope that is in you, should ask a reason for it (1 Pet. 3.15), what would you tell them?

Next steps—Transformation: Review all the places you go each week. How diligent are you in seeking to bring the presence of the Kingdom there? How should you pray for the coming of the Kingdom in all your spheres?

6 Truthful

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2.1-4

Truth? Of course!

Undoubtedly, all who have interest in public policy matters in our country would insist that they are concerned that truth should be the guiding norm. That includes the nation's media and all our cultural institutions. In a free society, no politician, institutional leader, or communications outlet ever made much headway in their mission or career by promising to lie to and deceive the people they are intended to serve.

Which is not the same as saying that politicians or cultural authorities don't lie and deceive anyway. Many do. They just would not want us to *think* so, and they certainly would not admit to it.

And yet, "fake news", disinformation, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and outright lies from all sides wash over us every day from our cultural institutions and those who lead them. Everyone claims to be in possession of the truth, but because truth has been reduced to merely personal or party perspective, most of what passes for "truth" is just one or another form of the lie Paul warned against in Romans 1.18-32.

And yet the blaming, accusing, denying, and insisting on truth continue from all quarters in a hopeless farrago of information and opinion that divides more than unites us and leaves us highly suspicious of everyone's "truth" but our own.

The question is not, therefore whether we shall be a society founded on some notion of truth. The question is, rather, Which *view* of truth will obtain in the public square?

Remaking the foundations

In our day pragmatism, relativism, and narcissism occupy the commanding heights of what passes for truth. Proponents of these views are directing all the public policy battles according to changeable and unreliable tenets of right and wrong. The challenge to the Christian is to recognize the false pretenses on which public policy today is being developed and to challenge the viability of pragmatism, relativism, and narcissism for enabling government and all authorities to fulfill their God-given mandate.

It's not enough for Christians to weigh in on issues. We need to expose, challenge, undermine, dismantle, and replace the very foundations on which politicians and others pursue making policies that guide the affairs of our nation and define our lives.

Here is where it is very important that Christians should be especially active in the public policy arenas of conversation and publication. Opportunities abound on every hand for us to talk, write, and otherwise weigh in on the fallacies involved in seeking to build a truthful society on the shifty and shaking foundations of secular thinking. But we must prepare well, making sure we know what we believe and that we can identify the false premises and shaky logic of those whose view of truth is a house of cards.

While we will also want to be ready to work at making public policy through participation—if only as members of the electorate: "we the people"—the greater and more enduring victories toward establishing a sure and stable foundation of truth will be won in conversations with neighbors and friends, as we expose the flimsiness of contemporary views of truth, and in demonstrating the Biblical view of truth through our lives, ministries, persuasion, and love for our neighbors.

A Good Society

The great challenge today

We will only be putting bandages on an open, oozing sore if all we ever do is augur for decisions from legislatures and courts that reflect *our* understanding of truth applied to the public square.

Yes, of course, we must struggle in this arena continually, and in every other place where public policies are forged. But we are already seeing that not even a decision from the highest court of the land has been able to change the hearts of Americans on the issue of abortion; and the individual states are rapidly moving to make permanent the ongoing slaughter of the innocents which those who worked for the overturning of *Roe v Wade* hoped to stop. Abortion and all other areas of public policy are matters of the heart and mind more than of the ballot box or the courtroom. And only Christians can speak to the heart and mind with a power so transforming that it can bring truth and goodness to light in even the most hardened opponents.

The great challenge facing us today is the challenge of which foundation shall support our nation's policies in the years to come. Apologists for a secular worldview are busily at work, reconstructing every aspect of life in our society on a foundation other than that which our forebears laid, a foundation built more on opinion, partisanship, and opportunistic thinking than anything that even vaguely resembles the truth of God.

While we still have freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to argue, winsomely and respectfully, for the Biblical view of truth, we must prepare ourselves and encourage one another to take up this task day by day, through every open door of opportunity, with a view to exposing the folly of unbelief and demonstrating the firmness of a Biblical approach to truth. When our determination to achieve a truthful society is evident in all the arenas of public policymaking, we will begin to see hearts and minds moved for long term change.

For a good society must be a truthful society, or it will be no society worth living in at all.

For reflection

1. How consistent are you in learning about the views of "truth" that dominate in our society today? How ready are you to respond to these with a Biblical view of truth?
2. What can we expect if Christians refuse to take up the battle for truth in every possible venue?
3. What's one thing you can do to become more consistent in standing for Biblical truth?

Next steps—Preparation: Pray that God will give you boldness and opportunities to stand for His truth.

7 Prayer and Public Policy

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2.1-4

The great public policy mistake

With respect to matters of public policy, the great mistake Christians have made over the previous generation has been in thinking that public policy is, in the first instance, a *political* or even a *cultural* concern.

We have believed, that is, that the primary way to achieve a good society is through political activism or cultural reform. We have augured for policies more in line with our worldview, and for politicians who will support our views and forge policies and enact laws accordingly. At the same time, we have decried cultural forms and institutions which promote views and practices contrary to the teaching of Scripture.

We might have thought, after two generations of pursuing this tack, that we would see significant progress in stalling the juggernaut of pragmatism, relativism, and narcissism. Quite the contrary is the case. Proponents of a progressivist worldview have become established in all the halls of government in our society, in each of the major political parties, and in schools and colleges and cultural institutions throughout the land; and they show no sign of backing away from their agenda. They are much more adept in making public policy, and less bound by scruples of unchanging moral conviction.

The way to a good society is not, in the first instance, through politics and public policy. Nor is it through culture. Public policy is important, or else the Law and Word of God would not have so much to say about it. But we can only expect God to bless our efforts at achieving a good society when we undertake our work in line with what His Word teaches.

And as we have seen, the base language and primary locus of public policymaking is prayer.

The starting point for public policy

Public policy is not, first of all, a matter of politics or cultural reform. Like everything else in life, the making of public policy is first and foremost a *spiritual* issue. This is so because it is happening “under the heavens”, that is, in a world created, owned, and upheld by the Word of God. Jesus Christ has reconciled the world to His Father, and He is advancing His Kingdom in it for the purpose of making all things new (2 Cor. 5.17-21; Rev. 21.5).

God is sovereign in the affairs of men and nations. He rules and overrules all deliberations, acts, and policies according to His own good purposes and in His own way and time. And He is more favorable, in the long run and the short, to those who rest their hope in Him and trust His Word and ways in every aspect of life.

We will make the greatest headway in affecting the public policies of our nation and in achieving a truly good society, when we ground and pursue our work in the public-policy arena in prayer. Paul says it is not by politics that we may hope to achieve a just and good society; this can only be achieved when men everywhere lift up holy hands of prayer to the Lord (v. 8).

If men will pray, and pray in the manner Paul outlines in our text, we will have more hope of realizing a good society where the Gospel can flourish and truth and goodness will abound.

Prayer and public policy

Prayer is the means by which we may expect God to show us great things and mysteries we've never seen before (Jer. 33.3). Through repentance and prayer, we may hope that the Lord will begin to heal our land (2 Chron. 7.14). Only by praying without ceasing, with brothers and sisters from many congregations and communions, continually and fervently, and with a focus on public policy *and* the coming of Christ's Kingdom—only by thus praying can Christians truly hope to achieve the just and good society we seek (Matt. 6.10).

Here there is much work to be done. It seems clear today that we do not believe in such prayer. When in your church, for example, do people pray in this way? And especially, where do you see men in your church earnest in and devoted to prayer for a good society? When have you heard such prayers from the pulpit on Sunday morning? How often do prayers for such matters as we are concerned about in this study fill your own pleadings before the Lord?

If men will pray, God will bring His goodness to light in the land of the living. If men will not pray, though they exhaust themselves and their treasure in political and cultural reform, a good society such as Paul envisions will continue to slip through our fingers.

Failure to pray is simple unbelief. We must repent of our unbelief and take up the work of prayer with greater devotion and dedication. We shall not be able to realize progress in Christ's Kingdom, or in returning our nation to a greater experience of justice and goodness, apart from prayer.

Prayer is the starting point for public policy. Prayer must be the sustaining power of public policy. And prayer in the form of worship will be the outcome of public policies, forged in prayer, which lead to a peaceful, godly, dignified, true, and Gospel-friendly society. As long as we continue to regard prayer as a perfunctory matter, we shall not make progress toward the good society we seek. But let believers come together, lifting holy hands to the Lord continually and fervently for all aspects of public policymaking, and we will see the hand of God begin to move in our favor once again.

For reflection

1. Why do you think it is that men don't pray like Paul describes in these verses?
2. What can you do to encourage the men in your church to take prayer more seriously?
3. What will you do to improve your own prayers for a good society?

Next steps—Preparation: Review your practice of prayer. Is it of the sort that might conduce to realizing a good society? Where can you improve?

A Good Society

For reflection or discussion

1. In the Christian community, who has the responsibility to teach and point us toward a good society? What is your role in that effort?
2. What did Paul have in mind as the characteristics of a good society?
3. What role does the Gospel play in helping to realize a good society?
4. How can you encourage your fellow believers to think, pray about, and work for a good society?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this part of our study in "The Law of God and Public Policy"?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.